

Trip/Snowstorm

Numismagram Newsletter #114 (I/2024)



Since our last upload, we were able to take our first real trip since pre-COVID times, traveling both to New York City as well as to upstate New York to visit family. One of the many draws of visiting at this time was the final days of the *Manet/Degas* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. A comparing and contrasting of the two contemporaries saw more than 160 works sharing the same space and offered a great chance to see numerous paintings in particular that would otherwise have been difficult to view so easily. Given that the exhibition was in its final days of availability, the queues were tremendously massive, with lines simply to get into the museum taking some time. While there, however, we were able to view numerous other exhibits, installations, and collections, with these glass and gold leaf Roman portrait medallions (from the exhibition *The Good Life: Collecting Late Antique Art at The Met*) being of particular intrigue.



On the topic of viewing many works of art and grand paintings throughout the museum, it brings us to the first medal in this upload—a rather impressive portrait medal of Jesus Christ...



Almost serving as a mini icon, this bronze medal dating to Victorian England presents Christ as the savior on the obverse, while a much busier scene is presented upon the reverse. Here, Christ is presented as the consoler, as he is providing comfort to various afflicted individuals and groups. What's even more intriguing is that this reverse was adapted directly from a contemporary painting—that of Ary Scheffer, painted in 1851 in France. As such, it captures the powerful image and translates it from canvas to medal, all while retaining intricate detail on such a small scale.

Given the time of year, one would think that more numismatic pursuits would have been in store, such as visiting the New York International Numismatic Convention (NYINC). However, a tight schedule of just a few days in the city, as well as the show occurring the following week, made this impossible. The brevity of our time there also meant that a trip to the American Numismatic Society (ANS) would have been difficult to squeeze in as well. However, the topic of the ANS does tie-in to the next medal in this upload...



Issued by the ANS in 1902, this exquisite silver medal celebrates the visit to America of Prince Heinrich of Prussia (*Heinrich being the younger brother of Kaiser Wilhelm II*). The elegant artistry of this medal (*of which just 300 were produced in silver*) can be appreciated by all students of American numismatics, as it was sculpted by the man behind the Lincoln penny—Victor David Brenner. Brenner even underwrote the project, allowing the ANS to sell as many of the examples as possible in order to raise funds.

Though time in the city was brief, we still did have enough of it to enjoy food and drink at numerous places, many of which were new since our last time being in the city. One meal in particular was at P. S. Kitchen...



An entirely vegan restaurant, we enjoyed quite the meal, with our drinks and appetizers shown above: Crabby Cakes and Maitake Wings (with a side of potato salad), along with a 'Me, Myself, & Chai' and a local pilsner. No wine is shown, but it certainly would have been enjoyed as well if we had ordered any. And speaking of wine, here is the upload's next medal...



Issued in the early 20th century as a viticulture-related prize, this unawarded bronze medal features a rather interesting legend upon the obverse, translating to “the French vines have been revived by their American counterparts.” While the product page on our website goes into detail about what this exactly meant, the short story is that a blight (in the form of an insect) invaded French (and other European) vineyards in the mid-19th century, and it was only through grafting European vines with American (bug-resistant) vines that the invading insect was repelled.

Moving to our trip upstate, we were greeted just before our arrival there with the onset of a snowstorm, thus reminding me of all of the snow that I enjoyed (*or not*) while growing up. Though it wasn’t a large amount of snow (maybe around 6”), it did make the time that we were there visiting a bit difficult in terms of road conditions and closures. Nevertheless, we were able to enjoy scenes like this the day after the storm moved through, along with making this slightly tilted snowman...



No matter how much planning you put into a trip, Mother Nature can always remind you of her presence. And, right on cue, here the next medal in this upload—a multi-piece work of modern art by Kauko Räsänen...

Issued likely during the latter half of the 17th century in Augsburg, Germany (*so dated on account of its use of the Julian calendar, and not the Gregorian*), this pocket piece would have been of vital use in its era, as other forms of daily or calendrical reminders would not have been at close grasp. Featuring three disks, the outer two each spinning in order to reveal the desired data via cutouts, this fully working example presented the bearer with information such as the number of daylight and nighttime hours, the hours of sunrise and sunset, the beginning of that month's zodiac sign, and the particular day of the week on which any given day fell. Though not comparing at all to a smartphone, it did offer a level of information at one's fingertips that, at the time, only the bearer would likely have quick access to. What makes this even more unique is its hand engraved nature, with all aspects having their own charm. The design on the obverse even features a personification of time flying away, with the reverse presenting an idea of peaceful contemplation—all done painstakingly by hand. Fully functional and endlessly enthralling, it's one of the most interesting pieces that we have offered.

Lastly, speaking of how quickly this past fortnight has transpired, and given the recent beginning of the opening round of the Australian Open, it seems only fitting that we end with a tennis-related medal...



This incredibly rare pentagonal medal is also up there in terms of intrigue, as its output has to be incredibly small. What's more is its unusual design, in terms of shape and use of a convex obverse and concave reverse. Created by Fred Rich in 1981, it celebrates the Swedish great, Björn Borg, who captured five consecutive men's titles at Wimbledon—an incredible and seemingly unfathomable feat and degree of dominance over the sport. While such dominance has become more commonplace by a select few over the past quarter century, Borg's level at that time was unrivaled. Rich's design drew inspiration from the five titles in his use of five sides, the obverse showing Borg celebrating each year with the trophy. Meanwhile, the reverse utilizes the concavity that parallels the convex nature of the obverse in order to create a bird's-eye view of Centre Court, its grounds enameled in green, its spectators all throughout in the stands at varying depths. Like Räsänen above, it shows how far the theme of the medal can go, and how each are their own miniature works of art. It is difficult to know how many Rich cast, but the output, owing to a lack of information anywhere about it (outside of a single mention in one issue of *The Medal*), must be paltry. As such, it is easy to say that this is very likely the only such example of the type that one is ever going to encounter.

For all of this upload's new items, please click [here](#) or on the banner art below. We will be back again at the beginning of February with another great mix of art and historical medals.



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